

CHAPTER 11.

THE REALITY OF FICTION- WRITING IN SITUATIONS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

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Verbal arts are integral to the mutual development of individuals and society during and after political violence. Although scholars have examined how the powerful use language to provoke political violence, young people's uses of oral and written communication for interacting in unstable environments are relatively unexplored. Researchers and practitioners working with youth in the aftermath of political violence sometimes elicit personal experience narratives for psychological treatment or, less often, for testimony. We now understand, however, that narrating is a dynamic process for making sense of life, rather than primarily a vehicle for reporting feelings or facts. Just as nations in conflict and transition exert pressure on their people to tell stories justifying conflict or guiding the country in a new direction, individuals' stories connect their experiences and ideologies to extant circumstances. From the perspective of socio-cultural theory, we understand that people use symbolic tools to understand and influence their environments (Vygotsky, 1978). On this view, cultural tools like narrating are malleable for interacting with requirements and sanctions in troubled times. We must, thus, acknowledge the social nature of narrating by considering the narrator-audience-context relationship as embedded in knowledge, especially in dramatically changing contexts but also in apparently banal ones.

Although writing does not typically enter into research or practice with youth in political emergencies, we have found that even relatively uneducated and multi-lingual youth seize cultural imaginaries to engage with their environments (Daiute, 2010). In this chapter, I explain how young people growing up across a landscape of political violence and transition in the 1990s former Yugoslavia used fictional genres, in particular, to consider political issues. Inquiry in such contexts where political ideologies are in flux then offers implications for broader inquiry and practice.

This discussion of the politics of fiction writing draws on analyses of a rich database of narratives from a larger study on the mutual development of individuals and society (Daiute, 2010). Aida, 13 year-old participant in that study, used auto-

biographical and fictional narrative genres strategically, albeit probably implicitly, to express different kinds of conflict in different realms of life. Aida, like her peers, may use personal experience narrating to relieve emotional stress, but she also employs the creative realm of fiction to deal with what is confusing, frightening, or taboo in her environment. When invited to a story-telling workshop at a local Bosnian bakery in a small US city, Aida¹ recounts a rupture in her family.

My cousin got into a fight with my parents because we we're going to visit Bosnia and my cousin's son was going to Hawaii because he's in the military and we didn't know that and we got mad because they didn't come to wish us luck with our flight. After we came back from Bosnia they still don't come over and we haven't seen them in three years.

In that brief narrative, Aida embeds international events in family history, attendant feelings, and an unresolved estrangement. As a child who lived through war in Bosnia and was then displaced from her homeland, Aida values connection, a quality expressed in relation to life in the United States, in her story entitled "Nina and Elma."

The news was that the mayor canceled the event. Everyone was so sad. They cancelled it because they didn't like everybody in the community. Everyone went up against the mayor and they won and the mayor went to prison for discrimination.

This brief story recounts power relations among characters in political categories ("the mayor," "everyone in the community"), the exertion of political power ("the mayor cancelled the event"), solidarity with push-back ("Everyone went up against the mayor"), resulting circumstances ("they won," "the mayor went to prison"), and exclusionary intentions ("They cancelled it because they didn't like everybody in the community" "... for discrimination"). Differences across these narratives indicate the context-sensitive nature of narrating, an idea explored in genre theory.

DEVELOPMENTAL GENRES

Genre is a concept linking language, people, and contexts (Bakhtin, 1986; Christie, 2007; Cope & Kalatzis, 1993; Gee, 1993). Genres are texts that "do

different things” (Cope & Kalatzis, 1993, p. 7). Defined as responsive activities in chains of communication (Bakhtin, 1986), genres imply a range of interlocutors involved physically and symbolically in relevant events that become interwoven in the content of any text. People experiencing collisions of power and perspectives like those during armed conflict and political revolution use discursive activities to pay close attention to what is going on around them. Understanding this dynamic meaning-making function of written language is critical to teaching and research in the twenty-first century (Smagorinsky, 2001).

Composition researchers have explained that genres develop in communities of practice, yielding, for example, different styles of narrating personal experience in African-American and European-American families (Heath, 1983), in families of different socio-economic means (Nelson, 2003), in home and school (Cazden, 2001), and in gender groups (Bamberg, 2004). Some researchers have applied the concept of genre to examine processes in culturally diverse settings, such as those obscuring or excluding minority people’s involvement in mainstream discourses (Gee, 1996). Across time, individuals’ experiences with diverse genres increase, as does the complexity and control of their use (Daiute, 2010). Educational contexts can foster young people’s increasingly skillful application of diverse genres, as shown in study designs employing African-American Vernacular English (Lee, 1993) and musical genres like hip hop (Fisher, 2007; Mahiri, 1998) to support expository writing skills. Prior research in urban public schools indicated, moreover, that in a violence prevention program, children as young as seven years used features of diverse narrative genres to adjust their personal experience writing *toward* values expressed in the curriculum (“use words, not fists,” “conflicts can always be resolved”...), while at the same time adjusting fictional writing *away* from the curriculum values (Daiute, 2004; Daiute et al, 2001; 2003). The present study extends inquiry into such context-sensitive uses of narrating to mediate personal, social, and political relations in situations of political violence.

CONFLICT ACTIVITY ZONES

Millions of young people in over 38 nations and escaping to scores of other nations live in situations of political violence and transition that challenge development. Children and adolescents miss school during acute phases of violence, during escape to safer ground, and often for extended periods of time (<http://www.crin.org>). Some young people are isolated with their families in shelters or refugee camps, and many are separated from their parents or other adult family, having to care for younger siblings (Hart, 2008). In urban areas of

the global south, many young people find refuge with peers on the streets where they are bereft of resources and appropriately mistrustful of formal institutions (Hansen, 2008). One of the most important yet under-explored developmental activities in educational and community organizations in conflict-affected settings is writing. Two major reasons for this gap are the overwhelming focus on psychopathological responses to violent circumstances (Bonanno, 2004; Boyden, 2003) and the assumption that writing is less accessible than other symbolic media.

To many outside the literacy field, writing seems overly challenging, yet, it is in situations of extreme challenge that humans developed symbolic tools for expressing their feelings and thoughts, in part to join forces with others for survival (Donald, 1991). Humanitarian aid workers, anthropologists and others who interact with young people in the field report on their resilient capacities for personal and collective thriving via problem-solving (Hart, 2008; Naidoo, 2011). Such reports implore researchers to study how young people use complex symbol systems like language for coping and development. Long overdue are examinations of whether and how opportunities to communicate in diverse ways increase young people's control over their subjective responses to unstable and dangerous situations. Using a range of genres for relevant purposes may be especially useful for figuring out what is going on, how one fits and, perhaps, how one can make a difference. Given such motivations, even minimal support for narrating can set a developmental process in motion.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DIMENSION OF GENRES

An individual guides each communication act in relation to how listeners/readers might judge him/her. Occurring implicitly in everyday life, this meta-pragmatic process involves monitoring communication acts (Reyes, 2011; Searle, 1970). Research in politically contentious situations replete with inequalities, violence, and societal changes should examine how power relations are embedded in discourse. The dynamic relation of narrator, audience, and context is especially relevant to research and practice in situations where those in power express political positions blatantly (Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 2001), imposing specific requirements and sanctions on regular folks (Billig, 1995; Bajraktari & Serwer, 2006). Narrating is a means of creating culture (Bruner, 1986), becoming a member of a culture (Nelson, 2003; Tomasello (2005), and influencing the development of culture (Daiute, 2004). For this reason, understanding power dynamics in cultural development is crucial to developmental inquiry and practice. Prior analyses offer insights about how people discursively

engage in various kinds of conflict in multicultural urban settings (Labov & Waletzky, 1997), academic settings (Stanley & Billig, 2004), therapeutic settings (Billig, 1999), legal practices (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000) and everyday interactions between men and women (Tannen, 2001). As in all social relations, but most poignantly in situations of conflict, much is said between the words, some deliberately omitted or repressed (Berman, 1999). Scholars have identified various mechanisms for interweaving explicit statements (referential meaning) and implied meaning (evaluative meaning) (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). Human relations are defined at least in part by the interplay of such referential and evaluative meanings in oral and written communications.

Conversational analysis has shown, for example, that people use linguistic devices, like hedges (“sort of”), negation, repetition, exaggeration, causal connectors, and metaphor to indicate the significance of their communications (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). Beyond enumerating events, Aida, for example, indicates her perspective on events with devices like causal attributions (“because” “and”) and psychological verbs (“didn’t know”). Re-reading Aida’s narrative with this in mind, we see how a seemingly objective sequence of events expresses her family’s blamelessness (“we didn’t know”), while cautiously avoiding blaming the cousin’s family. In the fictional narrative, Aida does her work more explicitly. In addition to turning the plot on an abuse of power, “the mayor went to prison for discrimination” “because they didn’t like everyone in the community,” Aida uses evaluative devices, “so,” “everybody,” “everyone” to heighten the drama of that story of exclusion. With such strategies developed from early in life, Aida deals, at least symbolically, with the dilemma of living in a land of opportunity, while feeling excluded by Americans’ animosity toward immigrants and Muslims, two groups with which she identifies. Increasing our understanding of this process is important for research and educational design intending to understand and support human development.

A six-year practice-based research project, *Dynamic Story-telling By Youth*, involved 137 12 to 27 year olds growing up during and after the violent disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Daiute, 2010). I designed the study to find out whether and how young people across age groups and post-war country locations would orient to past troubles and/or present circumstances. Over several years visiting different ex-Yugoslav countries (2004—2007), I found that community-based organizations would be optimum sites for learning about how young people understand what it means to grow up during and after war. The ethnographic phase of the research indicated that public schools were operating under strong pressures to implement specific histories and reforms, while community centers, although not without their own issues, were more flexible spaces for youth participation and cross-context research.

Community organizations in such contexts provide various kinds resources, like computers and spaces for youth gatherings, supports for thinking critically and creatively about their environments, and guidance toward collective projects like rebuilding damaged bridges. Leaders of participating organizations reviewed a preliminary research workshop curriculum, suggested revisions, offered final approval, reviewed translations, distributed an approved recruitment flyer to young people in their local area, and scheduled workshops as appropriate from April through September 2007.² This process yielded 137 participants aged 12 to 27, distributed relatively equally across countries, ages, genders, and extent of participation in a community center.

All participants were exposed to violently changing environments, albeit in different ways based on their locations during and after acute and resolving phases of the war. These young people in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and a refugee community in the United States faced diverse social, economic, and other challenges and opportunities before and during data collection for this study. Across these contexts, some young people's experiences included direct exposure to violence (bombings, shootings, personal injury, loss of loved ones); displacement (sometimes multiple times); consequences of such violent events (lack of food, water, freedom of movement, schooling); or hearing of losses to others they knew.

Because of strict societal sanctions on what can be said and what should not (Berman, 1999; Billig, 1995; Gagnon, 2004), the workshop curriculum engaged participants in numerous writing activities with diverse author-audience relationships. Applying the concept "addressivity" from literary theory, narrating activities systematically varied author-audience relationships from first person autobiographical conflicts (exposing the author directly to audience judgment) to third person autobiographical conflicts (exposing the author as an observer) and fictional conflicts (allowing the author to remain outside the story or to invent a character position, thus subjecting him/her less to direct exposure), as in the following prompts:

Write about a time **when you or someone you know** had a conflict or disagreement with someone your age. Tell me what happened. ... Who was involved? What happened? Where was it? When was it? How did those involved think and feel about the conflict? How did you handle it? How did it all turn out?

Write about a time when **adults you know (or the "community")** had a conflict or disagreement. Tell me what

happened. ... Who was involved? What happened? Where was it? When was it? How did those involved think and feel about the conflict? How did they(you?) handle it? How did it all turn out?

Using the following story starter, complete your own version of the story.

... and (from two groups) met at a ground-breaking of the new town center building. Everyone at the event had the opportunity to break the earth for the foundation and to place a brick for the building. It was an exciting community event and everyone was pleased that the new building would mark a new future. As they were working to begin the foundation, and had a conversation about how they would like to make a difference in their town so their children could live happily together. All of a sudden, someone came with news that changed everything! What was the news? How did everyone involved think and feel? How did it all turn out?

Based on results of prior research, where elementary school children adjusted their autobiographical narratives to conform to classroom values and fictional narratives to express counter-curriculum values, I designed the varying author-audience-context stances to provide the youth in the post-war sites with relationally flexible tools. Given the pressures for discourse to conform to political values, those young people would need some freedom to engage and resist narratives of and beyond war.

As evidence that participants used these narrative genres differently, Table 1 presents the most frequent plot categories accounting for 400 narratives created in the research workshop.³ The plot analysis summarized in Table 1 indicates the primary literary conflict issue and strategies to resolve that conflict across the genres. To illustrate plot conflict issues, I offer the following brief narrative and subsequent list of continuations to illustrate each category on Table 1:

It was a chilly day, when the conflict occurred. Events were leading up to it for some time. The girls on the bus approached me whispering ... (narrative continues ...)

The primary plot conflict issues emerging in the analysis include: *Social relations*: then one of them asked why was I saying bad things about their other

friend; *Differences of opinion*: then two of them began to argue about who was to blame for the getting in trouble at school; *Physical altercations*: one of the girls pushed me off my seat; *Politics-infrastructure*: then we all turned to commotion in the front of the bus where the bus driver and a parent argue about which politician (all corrupt according to me) would lead the country to a better future; *Character/Emotion*: I went back to reading my book because I didn't want to talk to those hypocrites; *Fate, silly reasons, no conflict*: they were starting to look like their parents making a fuss over nothing.

Subsequent resolution strategy categories include: *Psychological deliberation*: I thought about what they said and realized they had a point; *Other intervention*: after she pushed me off my seat, the bus driver came and made her get off the bus; or *Collective action*: after the corruption touched us personally, we made a workshop to teach other young people about how to recognize corruption as the first step to ending it.

As shown in Table 1, the autobiographical adult conflict narrative and the fictional community narrative elicited more issues of politics-infrastructure than did the autobiographical conflict among peers.

Table 1. Most common plot structures across narrative contexts

	Autobiographical peer conflict narrative	Autobiographical adult conflict narrative	Fictional community conflict narrative
Conflict Issue			
Social relations	X		
Differences of opinion	X	X	
Physical altercations	X		
Politics-infrastructure		X	X
Character/Emotion	X		
Fate or no conflict	X	X	
Resolution strategy			
Psychological	X	X	X
Other intervention		X	
Collective action			X

As shown in Table 1, autobiographical accounts of conflicts among peers revolved around the broadest range of issues, including social relations (altercations about loyalty to friends), differences of opinion (disagreements about whether liking folk-dancing is “yugonostalgic”), character/emotion (she is stub-

born), and fate/no reason (fights are inevitable in families). As shown in Aida's narrative about a conflict with a peer, relationship issues and interactions are paramount.

I used to be friends with Milicia but then she started ignoring me because people liked me better and we started being mean to each other and we aren't friends any more.

Although many educators and researchers emphasize first person writing, genres allowing young narrators some distance are intriguing for further inquiry, as indicated above with the category of "politics-infrastructure" as a narrative focus. A guiding question for this analysis is "How do young people (across political-economic contexts of ex-Yugoslavia) use narrative genres varied for audience-author relationships to enact diverse knowledge of and interactions with socio-political issues?" and "What do those patterns indicate about how these youth were interacting with what was going around them (between the narratives) while crafting their discourses? Ultimately, the question is "How do we use symbolic tools, like narrating, to engage with what is going on in our environments and how we fit?"

ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH FICTION

Detailed analysis of 154 adult conflict narratives (ACN) and fictional community conflicts (FCN) by 77 young authors (who wrote both) identified differences in plot structures (conflicts and resolutions) revolving around interpersonal relations, social systems, or political relations. Analyses leading to the summary in Table 1 show that the majority of both autobiographical adult conflict narratives (37.2%) and fictional community narratives (54.6%) enact issues of politics-infrastructure. Based on those findings, I delved into that category and found distinctions between plots enacting social systems, defined as conflicts among interlocutors in social or cultural roles (rather than in interpersonal relations) interacting in social situations (such as on buses or in the neighborhood) versus plots enacting institutional relations, defined in terms of political roles (such as mayor, government, or everyone who wanted justice) interacting via power dynamics (such as edicts or protests) and often resolved with collective action. As shown in Table 2, fictional narratives revolve around political relations (45.5%) much more than social systems (11%), while autobiographical adult conflict narratives revolve around social systems (26.6%) compared to a few political plots (9.1%).

Table 2. Percentages of autobiographical and fictional conflict narratives revolving around social systems and political relations

	Interpersonal		Social system		Political relations	
	ACN	FCN	ACN	FCN	ACN	FCN
Bosnia & Herzegovina 18 Pairs* 36 Narrs	0	0	30.6	19.4	0	50
Croatia 32 Pairs 64 Narrs	12.5	1.6	21.9	6.2	12.5	45.3
Serbia 13 Pairs 26 Narrs	3.8	0	26.9	7.7	19.2	42.3
US 14 Pairs 28 Narrs	3.6	3.6	32.1	3.6	14.3	42.9
Totals 77 Pairs 154Narrs	6.5	1.3	26.6	9.1	11.	45.5

These young authors used fictional narratives to create plot conflicts around political, economic, or legal issues (“didn’t have a permit,” “selected a location in the wrong zoning area,” “ran out of public funds,” “the man who had the money took it and ran from the country and betrayed everyone”); power struggles (“the mayor cancelled the event,” “each one blamed the other so nothing got done,” “... an ex-cop who still thinks that he has the power ... appropriated half the street,” “Serbia again under embargo,” “everyone goes to their own side to observe the ‘foundation’”) that threaten collective goals (“the future generation was betrayed,” “life in their little town would never again be the same,” “the path to the future was destroyed”) by at least some characters in institutional roles (“environmentalists versus the Fiat factory,” “the left and the right,” “mayor,” “government,” “last century mentality,” “Democratic Party and Radical Party”). When resolved, this set of fictional narratives includes protagonists who do so via collective action (“protests,” “secured some funds from the people and made the government match the funds,” “put the mayor in prison for discrimination,” “they will have to work together on the solution of the problem if they want their children to live happily and have better future,” “Both sides have formed a unity

committee, and figured out that there is no ‘higher power’ but that they decide, and that the center is after all the most adequate investment”). Literary devices like metaphors sometimes enact such processes, as with the “the Blues and the Greens” who are thinly veiled substitutes for “Serbia and Croatia,” “fires” burning houses is the distance across what looked like a “battlefield.”

In contrast, social systems involve plots situated in domestic relations, public relations in neighborhoods, in transportation (“people show their frustrations on the bus”), among characters defined in terms of groups (“parents,” “employers,” “granny,” “frustrated people”), around disagreements about values or practices (“argued about how to raise their child”), annoyances in daily life, to be resolved for harmonious daily life (rather than a stated collective goal), and resolved socially without political or legal means. Given the overwhelmingly political nature of the fictional stories, an analysis of what is uniquely expressed in those stories implores us to consider the young authors’ explorations between their autobiographical and fictional narratives.

WHAT IS SPOKEN BETWEEN THE NARRATIVES?

Table 3 summarizes differences between social system conflicts and political relations conflicts by authors across settings. Important to note here is that although the story starter depicts a scene, participants inserted characters and plot elaborations, which makes these differences all the more remarkable. Highlighting differences across narrative genres raises questions about what is going on in the life spaces between them.

For example, 18 year-old Nightwish whose family remained in Bosnia & Herzegovina during and after the war sketches a scene of unresolved frustration in her observation of local adults but very differently crafts collective hopeful action in the face of adversity in the subsequent fictional story.

The most unpleasant are the conflicts in the public transportation when a passenger has an argument with the driver. They usually use bad words and offend each other. ... One hot, summer day, I was riding on the bus full of tired, annoyed people who were coming back home from work. Some people were standing in front of the bus because they couldn't get in, which made them very angry. They argued with the driver. Such situations are so uncomfortable. They usually do not get resolved. People who couldn't get in, were left to wait for the next one.

Table 3. Plot-central political relations and social system issues *in* narratives revealing conversations *between* narratives

Common	Bosnia & Herzegovina-specific	Croatia-specific	Serbia-specific	US- specific
Social Systems				
Disturbances, arguments, fights among groups:	Disturbances between retired people/workers, football coach/referee, youth on public transport, shared buildings, neighborhoods, youth clubs; embarrassment about bad behavior in front of peers in school	Similar to Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia—also between neighbors over land rights, young/old, employer/employee, youth and police, teachers/students over grades, friends about quality of a film, drunken adults about nothing	Among neighbors over parking spaces, vandalism, trees hanging over yard; among sports fans, ethnic groups (Gypsies), teachers, employer/employee, political official/shoppers in grocery store	When translating for relatives, violence with other ethnic groups in city, local businesses & community
Arguments, fights in family systems:	Over family obligations, over youth rights to go out, among families in a refugee shelter	Similar, over grades, curfew, responsibility to care for elders, parents' affective relationships	Similar to Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia	Over participating in family events, violations of religious rules, over going back to Bosnia, music choices
Interventions by non-protagonists:	Donations by generous individuals; Bus driver intervenes:	Often repeats because of human nature	Resolved by participants themselves (Note: unlike other groups)	Cops, Charity donations
Political Relations				
Official rules, practices violated:	No permit, code violations, illegal purchase	No permit, ownership status unresolved, foreign-owned/no Croats allowed, proposal rejected—must reapply	Lack of legal permission, zoning violation, taxes too high, doesn't meet standards, lack of funds, corruption	No license to build, permit not valid, soil not good

Powers invoked:	Mayor, officials, government, Police, actors not mentioned (use of passive voice)	Same as Bosnia & Herzegovin – add foreign companies, original owner of land (returnees), political groups, “man with briefcase full of papers”	Political parties, companies, external aggressor, unnamed international actors (Serbia in embargo, competitors within)	Mayor, everyone in the community (except Bosnians), immigrants, Professor, extremist groups
Powers-that-be exert control:	Divert funds for “more important purposes”, ordered gov’t officials to donate \$ for the center, failure to do job	Divert funds to build dam destroyed in the war, to build factory that will pollute & hurt people, to build house for mayor himself, to build a park, block progress with belligerence & mistrust, rampant corruption, mayor’s second thoughts	Airstrikes by external aggressor interrupt building, insincere approach by companies delays building, delay because Serbia under embargo, Good officials delay funding, require % of salaries	War coming so will have to build center elsewhere
People organize (exert their agency):	To raise funds, to overturn official decisions, apply to foreign organizations for funds, survey people’s wishes, protest, debate which group of children killed in war should get monument	Protest, petition, debate, strike, force issue in court, argue in the media (right before elections), call in higher power (Minister from Zagreb)	Funding delays while political parties argue, call in higher power	Protest, everyone goes against mayor causing him to be put in prison, people will be sad waiting while no more immigrants allowed

Illustrating a conflict in a social system, the narrative on the bottom of page 201 circles around people’s interactions in public transportation with dynamics among “annoyed people” in roles like “driver” who used a “bad word” to “offend each other.” Resolutions developed with feelings like being “uncomfortable” and a status quo of situations that “do not get resolved.” In contrast and less predictable, given the political-economic stagnation in Bosnia & Her-

zegovina at the time, is the sense of hopefulness in this characteristic fictional narrative by Nightwish.

Adnan and Maja were informed that there were no more funds for the construction of the new youth center. Adnan and Maja were a bit disappointed. They think how the new generations wouldn't have any kind of shelter to go to while they are young; they wouldn't have a place where they could realize their talents and ambitions with people who could direct them and teach them how to make their dreams come true. They knew how disadvantageous it was going to be because they themselves used to have such a place where they spent their youth. They had great memories about that center. Eventually, Adnan and Maja managed to get financial support from a foreign organization and complete the construction of the center, which then served the next generations.

Distinctively, this fictional narrative enacts feelings ("Adnan and Maja were a bit disappointed") and cognitions ("they think," "they knew," "they had great memories," "they managed to get financial support," etc.) in the context of political relations, broader than interpersonal or social systems. Those broader domains are invoked with images of "new generations," "shelter," and most poignantly "financial support," and "foreign organizations."

Characteristic of the approach by her local peers, Nightwish reserves resourcefulness and success for a fictional stage, which is not surprising because her country, which suffered major destruction during the war, continued to be dependent on outside economic aid and political forces, like a United Nations protectorate, in the post-war period. While for Aida, being an immigrant and Muslim is an issue to explore in the veil of fiction, her Bosnian Muslim peer Nightwish is more concerned with the economic deprivations of post-war Bosnia & Herzegovina where she lives.

The following texts by 18 year-old Lolita illustrate characteristic concerns audible in the differences between autobiographical adult conflicts and fictional community conflict narratives by young people in Serbia.

I often have conflicts with my mother, primarily because my parents are divorced and the two of us live together alone. We are both stubborn; out of anger we say things we do not necessarily mean; to offence we respond with offence. I

have a problem with prohibition and she, as a single parent, sometimes worries too much and prohibits a lot of things. I'm trying to understand her fears and she my wishes; we compromise and overcome differences between us.

Lolita's narrative of "conflicts among adults" enacts an issue in a family system, "I often have conflicts with my mother, primarily because my parents are divorced," expressing multiple character perspectives, such as "out of anger we say things we do not necessarily mean" and trying to understand her wishes and she my wishes," with an agreement "to compromise." Enacting a broader relational system, Lolita creates the characters Marija and Marko to embody the responsibilities and hopes of a community to avoid "another failed hope".

They had run out of funds and the construction of the foundations had to be delayed or perhaps cancelled if they did not succeed in finding additional support. Marija and Marko, their neighbors, were disappointed. Another failed hope. Nothing again. ... They decided to talk to the neighbors and to take initiative. They agreed that everybody was going to give 10% of their salary (surprisingly enough, everybody was willing to do it). If somebody couldn't afford it, they might have contributed the amount they could. They raised considerable funds and the municipality agreed to make a contribution to the full amount. The building had been finished. It is now an orphanage. Apart from several people who are employed there, the children are being helped by the neighbors who contribute things they no longer need.

Lolita embodies in Marija and Marko a sense of collective will and strategy in the face of their responsibility, "the foundation had to be ... cancelled if they did not succeed in finding additional support," to overcome an overwhelming feeling that the public "were disappointed" because of "Another failed hope. Nothing again ... " Mobilizing their neighbors, these characters came up with a plan that "everybody was going to give 10% of their salary" with a provision for those who couldn't afford that to contribute "the amount they could." This effort that "surprisingly enough, everybody was willing to do" succeeded not only by raising "considerable funds" but also because the "municipality agreed to make a contribution to the full amount." Serving the greater good in several ways, this effort to build an orphanage led to employment for several local people and the ongoing participation "by the neighbors who contribute things

they no longer need.” In the contemporary Serbian context, such an approach might have been scorned as “Yugonostalgic” and, thus, reasonably reserved for a fictional story.

If mediation is the “conductor[s] of human influence on the object of activity” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55), we observe mediation in action when we focus between the narratives to examine young people’s uses of narratives as symbolic tools to engage with existing and possible worlds. Participants’ variations of narrative stances varied for social relations indicate quite strikingly their function as tools “externally oriented . . . aimed at mastering and triumphing over nature.” If it is, thus, unacceptable to narrate Serbian victimization with a public face, then appropriating the mask of fiction to do so can link shared knowledge and personal feelings to acknowledge that some Serbians suffered in the 1999 NATO bombing of Belgrade. The same process serves youth in Bosnia & Herzegovina where a certain public currency comes from having been victims in the war, while longing for agency. This dilemma emerges in the contrast between young Bosnians’ autobiographical narratives where public tensions stagnate in everyday life and their fictional stories enacting collective action and happy endings. We extend the socio-historical meaning of “mediate” to define the functions of narrating and other symbolic tools “to act as a go-between” or “to intercede” in socio-cultural spaces where narrators interact to identify, manage, and change cultural values. Differences between each pair of narratives offer insight into discourses in specific contexts that may have influenced young authors’ self-presentations, self-censorings, but also their critical and creative alterations. Because common plots emerged in relation to specific material and symbolic circumstances of places in this study, we have been able reasonably to imagine at least some of the concerns that led to presenting certain issues while reserving others.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This study of youth narrating in situations of political violence indicates the value of using written genres as cultural tools for the interdependent development of individuals and societies. Dangerous situations indicate, moreover, the need for fiction, as an especially fertile companion for autobiography, as it offers young people a protective context for engaging with, reflecting on, and sometimes critiquing circumstances of ongoing conflict. This “between analysis” reveals processes young people use to negotiate the incredibly complex aftermath of war in struggling nations or struggling communities as well as in powerful nations that exclude youth. These results indicate the value of ongoing research and practice with multiple genres as mediations in challenging environments.

This study has implications for writing and psychology studies. In particular, participants' demonstration of *relational complexity*, that is their use of systematically varied narrative genres, indicates their ability to use narrating as a tool rather than as a representation of stable individual meanings or memories. This analysis raising the voices between narrative genres indicates the importance of shifting from valuing autobiographical narrating for singular, authentic, coherent representations of personal self to research and practice allowing narrators to perform their complexity as interlocutors with diverse issues, others, and contexts.

Although many researchers cite socio-cultural theory (cultural-historical theory) as their research foundation, few design research consistent with that theory. One of the major disconnects between that theory and popular method is the emphasis on interviewing about phenomena of interest rather than activities enacting meanings in context per se and/or as the basis for reflecting on issues. A theory positing meaning-making as a socially distributed process must consistently foreground social relational dynamics of the context where, for example, narrating occurs. Comparing narrations varied systematically for their social-relational stances indicates considerations between the narratives, where narrators interact with their broader contexts in relation to an ideological umbrella protecting what is acceptable to state openly and protecting against what is less acceptable or forbidden. With an intervention that varies speaker/author—listener/audience author positions in meaningful activities, we can build studies and interventions to make explicit the reasons and relations motivating why we communicate.

Designing to allow dialogic relations might evoke critique, conflict, and contradiction. When we consider that thought and activity are relational, we must engage complexity, polyphony and even cacophony, given the diverse relationships and circumstances of contemporary life. Uses of symbolic tools develop human capacities but it may be the dialogically strategic uses of those tools to address socio-political issues that in turn develops societies. For these reasons, rather than emphasizing autobiography or defining autobiography as real and fiction as not, our pedagogy should promote relational complexity. In addition to narrating in diverse relational stances, examining deliberations between narratives, as we have done here, can move students' processes a developmental step toward uses of culture to master context.

In summary, this analysis offers theory-based evidence for a new dimension of writing development—relational complexity—a skill to be recognized and supported in writing instruction and writing across the curriculum. Writing development is typically defined hierarchically in terms of incremental complexities of sentence structure and rhetorical structure, processes like planning

and revising, and qualities like coherence and voice. These skills are often studied, assessed and taught as though people develop unified rather than context-sensitive capacities. In contrast, relational complexity is the skill to adjust one's communications, including written texts, to audiences (implicit and explicit) and contexts (the specific circumstances present and invoked in the relevant environment). Toward this end, we can create curriculum that involves our students to write about meaningful issues in diverse stances, examining those differences, in part to consider what they are saying between the narratives and how we are making those decisions. Designing multiple activities in terms of diverse purposes, perspectives, and audiences (rather than a single narrative to identify a truth or extended interview with one interlocutor) invites young people to explore issues because those issues are confusing, upsetting, or impressive in some other way. As we see in this study, multiple expressions do not wander aimlessly but provide a participant an opportunity to circle around the contours of a text as well as within the texts for what matters.

NOTES

1. All names are youth-chosen pseudonyms. Transcriptions maintain writers' productions, as do translations from native languages as possible.
2. I and other members of the research team explained the project, observed workshops, and addressed questions.
3. These categories account for the plot central conflict issues and strategies for resolving those conflicts (including no resolution which does not appear in the table) across all the narratives. After generating the categories from several readings through all the narratives, I defined them with examples and applied them to the entire database.

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